

- » Getting clear on your ideal customer
- » Understanding the value you bring to the marketplace
- » Learning to take a prospect from awareness to raving fan

## Chapter 1

# Understanding the Customer Journey

Think about the last important purchase you made. Perhaps you bought a car, hired a babysitter, or switched coffee suppliers at your office. Chances are, you consulted the Internet to read reviews, get recommendations from friends and family on social sites like Facebook, and boned up on the features, options, and price of the product or service before you made your choice. Today, purchases and purchasing decisions are increasingly made online. Therefore, regardless of what you sell, an online presence is necessary to capitalize on this trend.

This new digital landscape is impacting organizations in more than just the lead and sales generation departments, though. Savvy companies use the Internet to drive awareness and interest in what they offer, but also to convert casual buyers into brand advocates who buy more and encourage members of their network to do the same.

In many ways, nothing in marketing has changed. Marketing is still about developing a mutually beneficial relationship with prospects, leads, and customers. We call the development of this relationship the customer journey. In this chapter, you learn to create a customer journey for your organization and the role digital

marketing plays in that journey. The rest of this book helps you to create and execute offers and marketing campaigns that intentionally move customers through the stages of this customer journey.



REMEMBER

The role of your digital marketing is to assist in moving a prospect, lead, or customer from one stage of the customer journey to the next.

## Creating a Customer Avatar

Because the **role** of your marketing is to move people through a series of stages from **cold prospects** to **ravid fans** and **promoters**, you must first attain clarity on the characteristics of your **ideal customers**. You want to get clear on **their goals**, the **challenges** they face meeting those goals, and where they **spend time consuming information and entertainment**. Creating a customer avatar will give you this clarity. Other terms for *customer avatar* are **buyer persona**, **marketing persona**, and **target audience**, but **customer avatar** is the term we use throughout this book.

A *customer avatar* is the **fictional, generalized** representation of your ideal customer. Realistically, unless your product or service fits within a **narrow niche**, you will have **multiple customer avatars** for **each campaign**. People are so much more than their **age, gender, ethnicity, religious background, profession**, and so on. People don't **fit neatly into boxes**, which is why **broad, generic marketing** campaigns generally don't convert well; they don't resonate with your audience. It is absolutely **crucial** that you understand and make your customer avatar as **specific** as possible so that you can craft **personalized content, offers, and marketing campaigns** that interest members of your audience or solve their problems. In fact, the **exercise of creating a customer avatar** impacts virtually every aspect of your marketing, including:

- » **Content marketing:** What blog posts, videos, podcasts, and so on should you create to attract and convert your avatar?
- » **Search marketing:** What solutions is your avatar searching for on search engines like **Google, YouTube** (yes, YouTube is a search engine), and **Bing**?
- » **Social media marketing:** What social media sites is your avatar spending time on? What topics does your avatar like to discuss?
- » **Email marketing:** Which avatar should receive a specific email marketing campaign?
- » **Paid traffic:** Which ad platforms should you buy traffic from and how will you target your avatar?

- » **Product creation:** What problems is your avatar trying to solve?
- » **Copywriting:** How should you describe offers in your email marketing, ads, and sales letters in a way that compels your avatar to buy?

Any part of the marketing and sales process that touches the customer (which is pretty much everything) improves when you get clear on your customer avatar. After all, you're aiming toward a real person — one who buys your products and services. It pays to get clear on the characteristics of that person so that you can find and present him or her with a message that moves this person to action.

## What to include in your customer avatar

The customer avatar possesses five major components:

- » **Goals and values:** Determine what the avatar is trying to achieve. What values does he or she hold dear?
- » **Sources of information:** Figure out what books, magazines, blogs, news stations, and other resources the avatar references for information.
- » **Demographics:** Establish the age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, income, employment status, nationality, and political preference of the avatar.
- » **Challenges and pain points:** What is holding the avatar back from achieving his or her goals?
- » **Objections:** Why would the avatar choose not to buy your product or service?

In some cases, you need to survey or have conversations with existing customers to accurately flesh out your customer avatar. In other cases, you may already be intimately familiar with the characteristics of your ideal customer. In any case, move forward. Don't wait for surveys or interviews to be conducted to create your first draft of an avatar. Instead, go ahead and make assumptions despite having no data or feedback, and put completing your research on your short list of to-do's. In the meantime, you can begin benefiting from the avatar you've created.



TIP

Giving a customer avatar an actual name assists in bringing this fictional character to life. In addition, your team members have a way to refer to each avatar among themselves.

Using the five elements described in this section, we created a worksheet that we complete each time we create a new customer avatar. The worksheet helps you hone in on the ideal customer and pair him or her with the right message. In the following sections, we go into more detail about this worksheet so that you can use it in your own business.

# Introducing Agency Eric: A customer avatar example

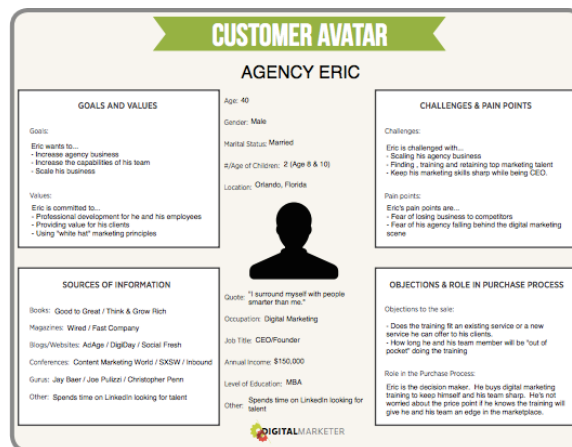
In April 2015, DigitalMarketer introduced a new offer. We began selling a new type of digital marketing training product: **Certification Classes**. These new trainings include exams, certificates, and badges, and they appeal to a new ideal customer. Of course, having a new ideal customer means that a new customer avatar must be built.

As a result, we defined **four distinct buyer personas** who would be interested in certifications and training from our company:

- » **The marketing freelancer:** Wants to distinguish herself from the other freelancers she is competing with in the marketplace.
- » **The marketing agency owner:** Wants to add to the **services** he can offer his **clients** and to sharpen the **marketing skills** of his **employees**.
- » **The employee:** Wants to distinguish himself at his place of employment or to secure a new job or promotion within his existing job.
- » **The business owner:** Wants to sharpen her own marketing skills and the skills of her internal marketing team members.

From the buyer personas, four new customer avatars were born. We call one of these new avatars, pictured in Figure 1-1, **Agency Eric**.

**FIGURE 1-1:** Agency Eric is a customer avatar who purchases the certification product from DigitalMarketer.



The next section describes the approach to filling out each section of the customer avatar worksheet so that you can define your customer avatars.

## Getting clear on goals and values

The customer avatar creation process begins with identifying the goals and values of one of your ideal customers. Make note of the **goals and values** that are relevant to the **products and services** you offer.

Being aware of your customer avatar's **goals** and **values** drives **decisions** that you make about

- » **Product creation:** What products or services can you develop to assist the avatar in meeting his or her goals?
- » **Advertising:** How can you describe these offers in your ads and sales copy?
- » **Content marketing:** What blog posts, podcasts, newsletters, and other content **vehicles** might your avatar respond to?
- » **Email marketing:** How can you tailor your email subject lines and body copy to be consistent with the avatar's goals?

At DigitalMarketer, our Agency Eric avatar owns a digital marketing agency and manages a team of marketers providing services to clients. One of Agency Eric's goals (shown in Figure 1-2) is to increase the capabilities of his team. Agency Eric knows that a more capable team will result in satisfied customers.

GOALS AND VALUES
Goals: Eric wants to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Increase agency business</li><li>- Increase the capabilities of his team</li><li>- Scale his business</li></ul>
Values: Eric is committed to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Professional development for he and his employees</li><li>- Providing value for his clients</li><li>- Using "white hat" marketing principles</li></ul>

**FIGURE 1-2:** Understanding the goals and values of your avatar is important.

Because Agency Eric has this goal, he is likely to open and respond to an email that promotes our company's Content Marketing Certification with the following subject line:

*Need Content Marketing Training?*

## Finding sources of information and entertainment

This section of the customer avatar worksheet is critical to determining where your customer avatar is spending his time on and offline. What books does he read? What celebrities does he follow? What blogs does he read? This is vital information when considering where you will advertise and how you will target those advertisements. We cover digital advertising and ad targeting in Chapter 10 of this book.



TIP

The key to truly understanding where your customer is getting information and entertainment is in identifying niche sources. Identifying these niches is fairly simple using the “But No One Else Would” Trick. To use this trick, you simply complete sentences like:

- » My ideal customer would read **[book]**, but no one else would.
- » My ideal customer would subscribe to **[magazine]**, but no one else would.
- » My ideal customer would attend **[conference]**, but no one else would.

The idea is to find the **niche books, magazines, blogs, conferences, celebrities, and other interests** that your ideal customer would be attracted to — but no one else would. For example, if you sell golf products, you wouldn't assign Tiger Woods as a celebrity. Tiger Woods is a celebrity your customer avatar would follow, but a large percentage of people interested in **Tiger Woods** are not **golfers** and aren't likely to buy your golf products.

Instead, choosing a more niche golfer like **Rory McIlroy** allows you to **hone in on your ideal customer** and **exclude people** who wouldn't find value in your product. If you find these niches when buying traffic from ad platforms like Facebook (covered in Chapter 10), you can **often laser-target your audience** by focusing on prospects who have these niche interests, while excluding less-than-ideal prospects.

## Honing in on demographics

Applying demographic information brings your customer avatar to life. In this section, you add information to your avatar such as age, gender, marital status, and location.



TIP

Although the usual demographics are critical, the exercise of filling in the “Quote” field (shown in Figure 1-3) can be particularly helpful to get inside the head of your ideal customer. The Quote field is how this avatar might define himself or herself in one sentence, or it’s the motto the avatar lives by. For instance, our quote for Agency Eric is “I surround myself with people smarter than I.” This sentence says a lot about this avatar’s character and motivation to purchase our marketing training products. Brainstorm ideas for your avatar’s quote with your team or someone who knows your business well.

**FIGURE 1-3:**  
Demographics  
bring the  
customer avatar  
to life.

<b>Age:</b> 40	<b>Quote:</b> "I surround myself with people smarter than I."
<b>Gender:</b> Male	<b>Occupation:</b> Digital Marketing
<b>Marital Status:</b> Married	<b>Job Title:</b> CEO/Founder
<b>#/Age of Children:</b> 2 (Age 8 & 10)	<b>Annual Income:</b> \$150,000
<b>Location:</b> Orlando, Florida	<b>Level of Education:</b> College Graduate
	<b>Other:</b> Spends time on LinkedIn looking for talent.

Demographic information for your customer avatar is also useful for choosing targeting options in ad platforms like Facebook. Bring your avatar to “life” as much as possible, even by visualizing the person if you can, because when you’re writing content, email, or sales copy, it can be beneficial to write as though your avatar were sitting across the table from you. Demographic information like age, gender, and location gives your persona a look and feel.

## Adding challenges and pain points

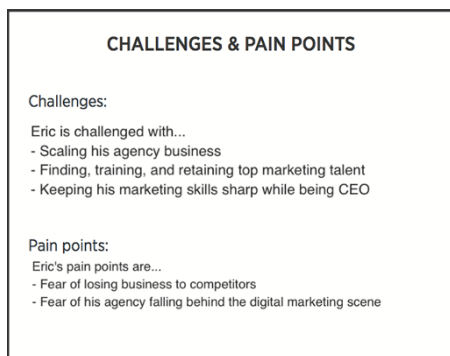
This section of the worksheet can help drive new product or service development. It can also help inspire the copy and ad creative you will use to compel your ideal customer to action. Copy is any written word that makes up your ad, email, web page, social media post, or blog post. Ad creative is an object that communicates information in visual form, such as an image, a GIF (graphics interchange format), a video, an infographic, a meme, or another form of artwork that you use to convey your message. You use copy and ad creatives to call out to your audience, capture people’s attention, and address how your product or service adds value to their lives by solving a pain point or a challenge they face.

When selling certifications to Agency Eric, for example, our company would do well to build solutions to his challenges and pain points and use language that addresses them in our marketing messages. For example, this avatar would respond to sales copy like the following:

*Are you tired of losing proposals simply because you don't offer content marketing services to your clients? Certify your team with DigitalMarketer's Content Marketing Mastery Course and Certification.*

Copy like this receives a response from Agency Eric because it is specific to one of his pain points, which is the fear of losing business to competitors (see Figure 1-4).

**FIGURE 1-4:**  
Understanding the challenges and pain points of your customer informs your marketing efforts.



## Preparing for objections

In the final section of the customer avatar worksheet, answer why your customer avatar might **choose to decline the offer** to buy your product or service. The reasons your avatar doesn't buy are called **objections**, and you must address them in your marketing. For example, if we know that Agency Eric is concerned with the **amount of time** his team members will be out of the office or unable to work while getting trained, we can send an email that overcomes that objection with a subject line like this:

*Get Content Marketing Certified (in One Business Day).*



**TIP**

You can prepare your own customer avatar as we discuss with the help of a resource from DigitalMarketer. Find it at <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/lp/dmfd/customer-avatar/>.

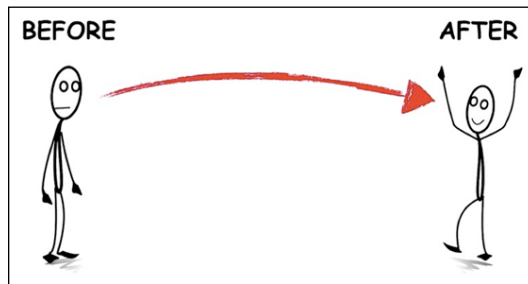


# Getting Clear on the Value You Provide

An important part of planning for digital marketing success is **understanding** the **value your organization** brings to the **marketplace**. The value your company provides is far greater than the **products or services it sells**. In fact, people don't buy products or services at all; instead, they buy **outcomes**.

Imagine a group of people who are discontent for one reason or another. This group of people are in what we call the **"Before"** state (see Figure 1-5). No matter what you're selling, you're trying to reach a group of prospective customers who are in this Before state. To gain some insight, write the adjectives that describe your prospective customer before she has experienced your product or service. Is she sad? Out of shape? Bored?

**FIGURE 1-5:**  
Businesses provide value by moving prospects from a "Before" state to an "After" state.



Source: <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/blog/customer-value-optimization/>

Now, leap forward into the future, to the point after your prospective customer has experienced your product or service. What is her "After" state? How has this person changed? In the same place where you took notes about her Before state, describe her After state. Is she happier? Healthier? More excited?

The shift from the Before state to the After state is what your customer is buying. This shift (or outcome) is the value that your business brings to the marketplace. Furthermore, the role of your marketing is to articulate this move from the Before state to the After state.

The understanding of this transition from Before to After is what allows you to craft what is called a Statement of Value. This statement is important because it sums up the value of your product or service. To craft your Statement of Value, simply fill in the blanks on the sentence shown in Figure 1-6.

**FIGURE 1-6:**  
Fill in the blanks  
on your  
Statement of  
Value.

STATEMENT OF VALUE	
_____	enables
(Product Name)	
_____	to experience
(Customer)	
_____	
_____	

Source: <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/blog/launching-a-business/>



REMEMBER

The role of your marketing is to assist in moving a prospect, lead, or customer from one stage of the customer journey to the next. At the beginning of this journey, your customer is in the Before state. By the end, you will have taken your customer on a journey to that customer's ideal After state.

## Knowing the Stages of the Customer Journey

If your business has acquired even a single customer, some kind of customer journey is in place. Perhaps this customer journey was not created intentionally, but it does exist. Or perhaps you call it something else in your organization, such as a “marketing (or sales) pipeline.”

Regardless of what you call it, becoming intentional about the movement of cold prospects, leads, and existing customers through the stages of this journey is the purpose of your marketing. When you've properly charted your ideal customer journey, you quickly find the bottlenecks that are restricting the flow of prospect to lead, lead to customer, and customer to raving fan.



REMEMBER

We can't overstate the importance of sequence in marketing, and particularly in digital marketing. Moving cold prospects from one stage of the customer journey to the next must be done seamlessly and subtly. You're not likely to convert a complete stranger into a brand advocate overnight. But you can gradually move the prospect from one stage of the relationship to the next. To move people through the stages of the customer journey, go through the following eight steps. A worksheet that visualizes the steps of the customer journey is provided in the final section of this chapter (Figure 1-12).

## Step 1: Generating awareness

Every repeat customer and raving fan of your business was, at one time, a complete stranger to your company. She had no idea what problem you solve, what products you sell, or what your brand stands for. The first step on her journey from cold prospect to raving fan is awareness. We go into more detail about tactics later in this book, but if awareness is your issue, you should employ the following digital marketing tactics:

- » **Advertising:** Advertising, both online and offline, is a reliable and effective method of raising awareness.
- » **Social media marketing:** Billions of people access social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn every day. Social media marketing is an inexpensive method of raising awareness.
- » **Search marketing:** Billions of web searches on sites such as Google and Bing are processed every day. Basic search marketing techniques direct some of that traffic to your website.

Figure 1-7 shows an awareness campaign from TransferWise, a company that was created by the same people who built Skype. TransferWise is a relatively new company in the money transfer business, and it uses the Facebook advertising platform to raise awareness of the service. Notice how the language used in this ad focuses on teaching what TransferWise is and how you benefit from using the service.



**FIGURE 1-7:**  
A Facebook  
advertisement  
focused on the  
goal of  
awareness.

Source: <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/blog/launching-a-business/>

## Step 2: Driving engagement

It's not enough to simply make a cold prospect aware of your business, products, and brand. You must engineer your marketing to capture the attention of your prospect and engage him. For a digital marketer, that engagement almost always takes the form of valuable content made freely available in the form of

- » Blog posts
- » Podcasts
- » Online videos

For example, the grocery store Whole Foods prides itself in selling fresh, organic foods from its hundreds of brick-and-mortar locations. The supermarket chain's online strategy includes its Whole Story blog, which engages its ideal customer with content relevant to the products the company sells. Blog articles with titles such as "9 Refreshing Summer Drinks You Need to Try Right Now" (see Figure 1-8) show existing and prospective customers how to use the products sold at Whole Foods.



**FIGURE 1-8:**  
An engaging blog  
post from the  
Whole Foods  
blog.

Source: <https://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/9-refreshing-summer-drinks-you-need-try-right-now>



REMEMBER

A prospect, lead, or customer may spend anywhere from a few minutes to a few years at any one of the stages in this customer journey. For example, a prospect might become aware of your blog and engage with it for a year or more before moving to the next phase of the journey. Others will sprint through multiple stages of the journey in the space of a few minutes. A healthy business has groups of people at all stages of the journey at all times.

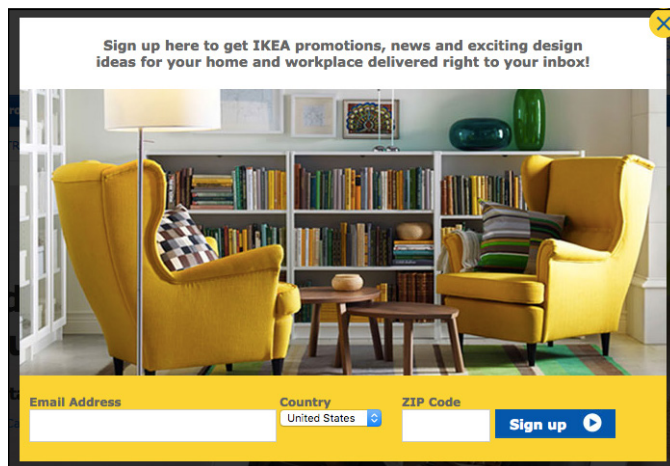
### Step 3: Building subscribers

The next step in the customer journey is to **graduate** a prospect from the “**merely aware and engaged**” stage into the stage of being **a subscriber or lead**. A subscriber is anyone who has given you permission to have **a conversation with him**. Savvy digital marketers create lists of subscribers by building **social media connections** on sites such as **Facebook** and **Twitter**, attracting **podcast subscribers** on services such as **iTunes** and **Stitcher**, or generating subscribers from **webinar registrations**.

Offline companies might build subscription online by **offering aware and engaged prospects** the ability to **receive physical mail** or **request a consultative sales call or product demo**.

But the **Holy Grail** of lead generation in the digital marketing realm is **email subscription**. Email is, by far, the **cheapest and highest-converting method** of moving a prospect through the rest of the stages of this customer journey. We tell you more about email marketing in **Chapter 11**, but for now, take a look at an example of an effective email marketing campaign from one of the **world’s largest furniture retailers, IKEA**.

IKEA builds social media subscribers on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Pinterest**, and **more**, but acquiring email subscribers is clearly the **focal point of IKEA’s digital marketing efforts**. Upon visiting the IKEA website, you’re asked in multiple locations to join **IKEA’s email list**. Figure 1-9 shows an email opt-in form from the IKEA website.

The image shows a screenshot of an email subscription form from the IKEA website. The form is overlaid on a photograph of a modern living room with two yellow armchairs, a bookshelf, and a coffee table. At the top of the form, it says "Sign up here to get IKEA promotions, news and exciting design ideas for your home and workplace delivered right to your inbox!". Below this, there are three input fields: "Email Address", "Country" (with a dropdown menu showing "United States"), and "ZIP Code". To the right of these fields is a blue "Sign up" button with a play icon. A small "X" icon is in the top right corner of the form overlay.

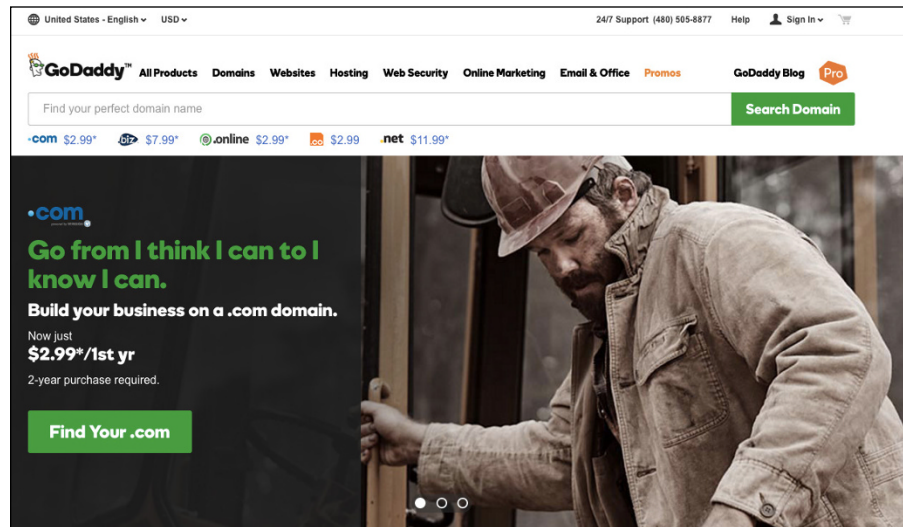
**FIGURE 1-9:**  
An email  
subscription offer  
from furniture  
retailer IKEA.

Source: <https://www.ikea.com/us/en/>

## Step 4: Increasing conversions

At this stage, the goal is to **elevate the commitment level** of the prospect by asking **him or her to give you a small amount** of time or money. **Low-dollar products or services, webinars, and product demos** are all good offers to make during this stage.

Up to this point, the relationship with this prospect through the first three stages of the customer journey **has been passive**. The goal of Stage 4 is not **profitability**, but rather an **increased level of connection** between the prospect and your business. One company that achieves this increased connection is **GoDaddy**, which allows you to, among other things, register a domain name for a website as well as host and design one for your business. GoDaddy uses a **low-dollar domain registration offer** with a two-year purchase (see Figure 1-10) to acquire customers and ramp up the commitment level.



**FIGURE 1-10:**  
A low-dollar offer  
from domain  
registration  
company  
GoDaddy.

Source: <https://www.godaddy.com/?isc=gofd2001sa&ci=>

## Step 5: Building excitement

Your marketing should **intentionally** encourage your customer to use the offer that your lead or customer accepted in **Step 4**. The business term for **getting your prospect to take advantage of an offer** is **customer onboarding**. Regardless of whether the conversion in Step 4 was a commitment of **time or money**, the relationship with this customer or prospect has a much greater chance of success if she received **value from the transaction**.

At DigitalMarketer, we have a community called DigitalMarketer Lab made up of thousands of entrepreneurs, freelancers, and small business owners. Each new DigitalMarketer Lab member receives an onboarding packet (see Figure 1-11) from our company through post mail that teaches Lab members how to get the most out of their new purchase. This packet builds excitement by explaining all the benefits of being a member, and it shows members exactly how to get started receiving those benefits. By building excitement and teaching our customers to be successful, we've seen dramatically lower cancellation rates.



**FIGURE 1-11:** This onboarding packet builds excitement and teaches the customer how to be successful with our product.



The value of the offers you make should far outweigh the price paid by your customer. Deliver great products and services and create marketing campaigns that encourage the use of those products and services. After all, your customers aren't likely to continue buying or promoting your brand to others if they aren't using the product or service themselves.

## Step 6: Making the core offer sale and more

At this stage, prospects have developed a relationship with your brand. They may have invested a bit of time or money with you. People who develop this rapport with your company are much more likely to buy a more complex, expensive, or



risky product or service from you. We call this jump from passive prospect to buyer *ascension*.

Unfortunately, this is where most businesses start and end their marketing. Some ask cold prospects to make risky investments of time and money with a company they know nothing about. This is the equivalent of proposing marriage to someone on a first date: The success rate is low. Other brands stop marketing to a customer after that particular customer has converted (made a purchase) instead of staying in touch with and converting that person into a repeat buyer.

In the ascension stage, customers or prospects purchase high-ticket products or services, sign up for subscriptions that bill them monthly, or become loyal, repeat buyers. Assuming that you have done the hard work in Stages 1–5 of the customer journey, you should find that some of your leads and customers are ready to buy more, and buy repeatedly. That’s because you’ve built a relationship with them and effectively communicated the value you can bring to their lives. When you market to your customers in this sequence, they’re on the path to becoming brand advocates and promoters (see the upcoming sections about Steps 7 and 8). We discuss different strategies for selling more to your existing customers in Chapter 3 when we cover profit maximizers.

## Step 7: Developing brand advocates

Brand advocates give you testimonials about the fabulous experience they’ve had with your brand. They are fans of your company and defend your brand on social media channels and, if asked, leave great reviews for your products or services on sites such as Yelp or Amazon.

Your ability to create brand advocates depends on the relationship you have with these leads and buyers. When you’ve reached this step, your customer and your company are like close friends in the sense that developing the relationship to this level took time and effort, and maintaining that relationship — one that is mutually beneficial to both parties — will take time and effort also.

You build this relationship by adding value, delivering on the promise of your product (meaning that it actually does what you claim it will do), and with responsive customer service. By consistently delivering quality products and services, you can turn people into brand advocates and ultimately move them into the final step: brand promoter.



## Step 8: Growing brand promoters

Brand promoters go beyond advocacy and do everything from tattooing your logo across their chest (think Harley Davidson) to dedicating hours of their free time blogging and using social media to spread their love of your brand online. The difference between an advocate (Step 7) and a brand promoter is that the promoter actively spreads the word about your business, whereas the advocate is more passive.

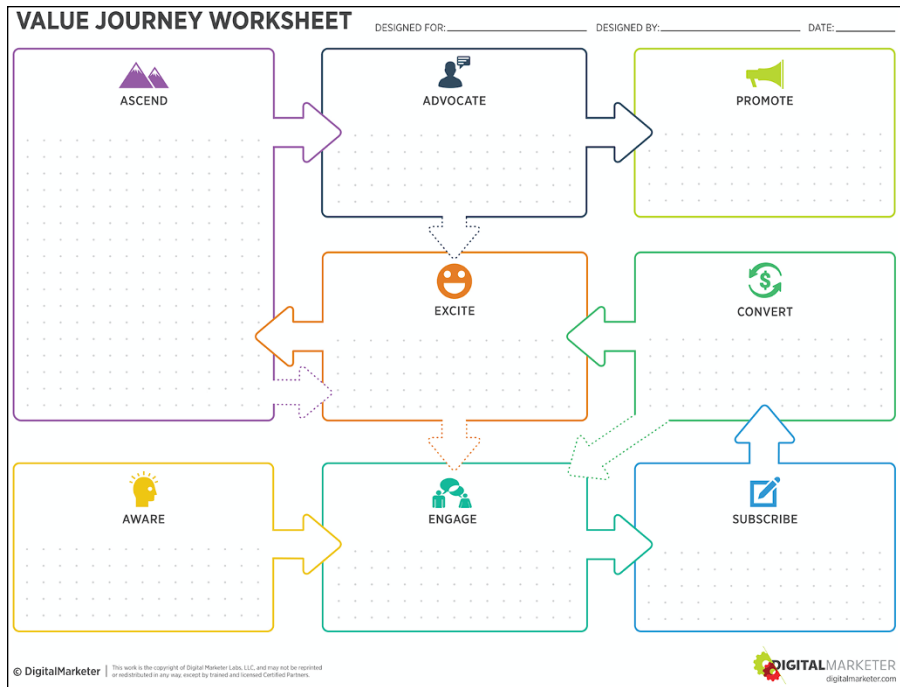
For brand promoters, your company has become part of their life. They know that your brand is one that they can trust and depend on. Brand promoters believe in you because your brand and your products have delivered exceptional value again and again. They have committed not only their money but also their time to you.

## Preparing Your Customer Journey Road Map

For successful businesses, the customer journey doesn't happen by accident. Smart digital marketers engineer marketing campaigns that intentionally move prospects, leads, and customers from one stage to the next. After you become aware of your ideal customer journey, the tactics (taught in the remaining chapters of this book) that should be employed become clear.

For example, if you determine that you have an issue building subscribers (Step 3 of the customer journey), you want to deploy tactics that generate email leads (covered in Chapters 3 and 11) and social media connections (discussed in Chapter 9) to move customers through this part of the customer journey.

Creating a customer journey road map that clearly delineates the eight stages that we cover in the previous section of this chapter (see Figure 1-12 for just such a road map) is a fantastic way to plan and visualize the path that an ideal customer will take from cold prospect to brand promoter. Gather the stakeholders in your company and complete a customer journey road map for at least one of your major products or services. Brainstorm which campaigns and offers (covered in Chapters 2 and 3) to use at each step of the customer journey to make people aware of your product and move them from awareness to their desired "After" state onto the path of a brand promoter.



**FIGURE 1-12:**  
Create a customer journey road map for at least one of your core offers.



You can create your own customer journey road map with a resource from DigitalMarketer by going to <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/lp/dmfd/customer-journey/>.

## Optimizing the Customer Journey

It's good that you've documented your customer journey, but just because you've written it down doesn't mean you're done. When you understand the customer journey, and after you've built it for your business, it's time to optimize it. The customer journey isn't something you laminate upon completion. It's not something you set and forget. If you want your business to grow — to truly be set up for success — you'll want to revisit and hone your customer journey as your business and customers evolve.



A good rule of thumb is to evaluate and optimize your customer journey every time you add, retire, or update a product or service. Also, if you add a new customer avatar to your business, again, it's time to optimize your customer journey.

# Avoiding an Optimization Mistake

As you begin to optimize your customer journey, your instinct may be to approach it from the beginning and start with Step 1: generating awareness. But that's not where you want to start. In fact, the awareness stage is the last place you want to start when optimizing your customer journey.

Why?

If you start from the beginning — as the saying goes — you're pouring more water into a leaky bucket. All the work you're doing to optimize the beginning steps of the customer journey will be for nothing if you have holes later in the journey that are causing your customers to get stuck or not convert at all.

To avoid this pitfall, you don't want to focus your optimization efforts on the beginning of the journey. Instead, you'll start toward the *end* of the journey.

When optimizing your customer journey, it's best to start at the ascend stage (Step 6). Start here with the perspective of, "How do I increase the average customer value? How do I remove the bottlenecks that are causing the customer to get stuck?" By plugging any holes in the ascension stage, you'll be able to maximize your profit. And with more profit, you'll be able to invest more into your journey (and *not* send leads and customers into a leaky bucket).

When you've maximized the ascension stage, work backwards.

- » Optimize your excite stage (Step 5).
- » Then optimize your convert stage (Step 4).
- » Then the subscribe stage (Step 3).
- » Followed by the engage stage (Step 2).
- » And finally, 'optimize the awareness stage (Step 1).

After you've worked backwards and optimized all of the beginning stages of the customer journey, you then turn your attention to optimizing the final two stages — brand advocates (Step 7) and brand promoters (Step 8), looking for ways to generate more of each.



REMEMBER

This is important and the key to optimizing your customer journey: work on *one* stage at a time. Focus all of your efforts on that one stage before you move onto the next one. Don't start a new stage until you've fully optimized the current stage you're working on. In the same vein, don't work on multiple stages simultaneously. Fix one stage at a time. If you jump around from stage to stage or optimize multiple stages at once, you're likely to miss holes and your optimization will be for nothing. Optimizing only one stage at a time helps you plug all your leaks and remove the bottlenecks for your customer.



TIP

As you optimize each stage, you're not just looking for holes you can plug. You're looking for bottlenecks the customer is facing, things that cause them to get stuck and prevent them from moving onto the next stage in the journey. And you're looking to remove those barriers so you can plug those holes and get more leads and customers at each stage of the customer journey.